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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 000058

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Prime Minister Sharon's Health

Key stories in the media:

All media led with, and extensively reported on PM Sharon's health condition. The media cited a statement issued last night by Hadassah Hospital Director Prof. Shlomo Mor-Yosef, saying that he is under sedation, on a respirator and paralyzed; that he is likely to remain under sedation for up to 72 hours; and that it is impossible to know what his condition really is under sedation. The electronic media reported that this morning, Sharon underwent another CAT scan and was again rushed into surgery. All major Hebrew-language media quoted medical sources as saying unofficially as saying that there are few chances that Sharon would recover (Yediot), or that Sharon's brain suffered serious damage (Maariv and Ha'aretz). In its lead story, Ha'aretz quoted Sharon's doctors as saying that Sharon has probably suffered irreversible brain damage that would preclude his ever resuming office.

Israel Radio quoted President Bush as saying Wednesday at a public appearance in Washington that Sharon is "a good man, a strong man, a man who cared deeply about the security of the Israeli people, and a man who had a vision for peace." The station quoted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as saying that Sharon "is a man of enormous courage." Israel Radio also quoted Secretary Rice as saying: "We are concentrating our

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prayers and our thoughts on hope for his recovery. I think that is the appropriate thing at this time because he is a huge and gigantic figure in Israeli politics and has turned out to be in the entire Middle East and in the world." Ha'aretz and Maariv filed similar stories. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Israeli Embassy in Washington kept U.S. officials updated on Sharon's condition all Wednesday night, and top Sharon aide Dov Weisglass phoned Secretary Rice during the early hours of the operation and updated her on Sharon's condition. The Jerusalem Post notes that Acting PM Ehud Olmert "is a well-known figure in Washington" and that last summer, weeks before the implementation of the withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank, Olmert held a lengthy meeting with Secretary Rice in which he provided a detailed

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explanation of Israel's planned moves.

Leading media reported that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian leadership stressed their concerns for the fate of the peace process and wished Sharon well. The media quoted the leaders of the terrorist organizations as saying that the region would be better off without Sharon. Maariv and other media reported that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed his hope that Sharon would die. The media reported that the defense establishment has

increased its state of alertness, particularly along Israel's northern border, and that there are concerns about terrorist attacks inside Israel.

Leading media reported that Olmert will meet Peres this morning. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert will assure Peres that he is a valued member of Kadima, even in the post-Sharon era. The newspaper notes that Olmert's move comes as an effort to block any attempt by Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz to return Peres to Labor. The media reported that during his first day in office, Olmert has succeeded in uniting Kadima under his leadership.

Maariv quoted Sharon as hinting in the last interview he granted (to the leading Japanese business newspaper Nikkei, on Tuesday afternoon) that Israel could start a dialogue with Hamas if the Palestinian group canceled its covenant advocating the destruction of Israel and if it disarmed.

Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday, Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, who was the IDF attache in Washington for the past year, took over the post of military intelligence chief from Maj. Gen Aharon Zeevi-Farkash.

The leading Israeli Internet news service Ynet reported on December 30 that Secretary Rice capped its "People of the Year" survey.

Leading media reported that on Thursday, Norwegian Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen, who is also the leader of Norway's Socialist Left Party, publicly backed a consumer boycott of Israel in solidarity with Palestinians.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that more than 20 percent of the estimated 3,100 North American immigrants who arrived in 2005 already had Israeli citizenship.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) quoted Dr. Bernard LaFayette, a former colleague and close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as saying in Jerusalem Thursday that the Dimona Hebrew Israelite community and its "village of peace" are an international model for nonviolence. LaFayette praised the Hebrew Israelites for not resorting to violence, despite the fact that they were denied recognition and permanent status in Israel for over 30 years.

Reporting from Baghdad, where he has been residing for the past two weeks, Ron Ben-Yishai of Yediot wrote that he discovered how terror has become a business and how freedom of speech and the media has penetrated Iraq, and that he had to find a new place of hiding upon being exposed as an Israeli.

Channel 10-TV and Ha'aretz published the results of a survey conducted on Thursday by Prof. Camille Fuchs of the Amanet Group's Dialogue Institute:

-Sharon's party, Kadima, would win 40 Knesset seats if elections were held today and the party were to be headed by Acting PM Ehud Olmert. Should Justice Minister Tzipi Livni succeed Sharon, Kadima would get 38 Knesset seats. Were Vice Premier Shimon Peres to take leadership of the party, Kadima would win 42 seats -- exactly the number of seats it would have garnered four days ago, when Sharon was still healthy.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll conducted on Thursday night:

-"Assuming Sharon does not return to public life, whom would you like to see heading the Kadima party?" Shimon Peres: 23 percent; Ehud Olmert: 21 percent; Tzipi Livni: 14 percent; Shaul Mofaz: 8 percent; Avi Dichter: 5 percent; Meir Sheetrit: 3 percent; 26 percent were undecided.

-"If Ehud Olmert heads Kadima, for which party will you vote in the elections?" Kadima: 39; Labor Party: 20; Likud: 16; Shas: 9; Arab parties: 7; Meretz-Yahad: 6; Yisrael Beiteinu: 6; National Union: 5; United Torah Judaism: 5; Shinui: 4; National Religious Party: 3

-"And if Kadima is headed by Shimon Peres, for which party will you vote?" Kadima: 42; Labor Party: 17; Likud: 16.

-"And if Kadima is headed by Tzipi Livni, for which party will you vote?" Kadima 36; Labor Party: 19; Likud: 19.

Prime Minister Sharon's Health:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[The Kadima Party] has no established political traditions to help it survive in the absence of its creator. But on the other hand, Kadima has a clear diplomatic message and a vital role to play in the stormy days to come."

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "The first thing that [Acting Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert will have to do is to impose his authority on the prominent members of this party [Kadima], because authority, whether that of Sharon and whether that of Olmert, is the only glue that will hold it together and give it signs of life."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It will not be enough [for Kadima] to pledge to continue Sharon's path since ... the public could only guess what Sharon's next step would have been."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Sharon dealt the myth of settling the territories a mortal blow. The public support he earned after disengagement was no less significant than disengagement itself."

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Israel is today in dire need of leadership capable of handling some of the most sensitive and monumental diplomacy in its history [regarding Iran's nuclear program]."

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in Yediot Aharonot: "What a tragedy: at least twice in this generation, when any chance ... of peace with enemies and bitter neighbors may have come up, a case of 'force majeure' intervened."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Way of Sobriety"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (January 6): "The joy with which Kadima was received by the public -- as evidenced by the results of the polls, which predicted that it would win more than 40 seats -- did not stem only from Sharon's charismatic and dependable leadership, but primarily from the political sobriety that he succeeded in instilling here. Over the last two years, the personal revolution that Sharon underwent has been shared by a large segment of the public.... This healthy sentiment does not depend solely on Sharon's leadership. Thus Kadima is not just Ariel Sharon, but the basis for establishing a moderate coalition.... The coming days will reveal whether Kadima was just a passing political episode or a catalyst for a major and necessary political change. Granted, it was approved as an official party only two days ago, and it has no established political traditions to help it survive in the absence of its creator. But on the other hand, Kadima has a clear diplomatic message and a vital role to play in the stormy days to come. If it finds a way to elect a leadership and solidify the party even without Sharon, that will constitute proof that there is life in the trail Sharon blazed even after he himself is gone."

II. "We Must Go On"

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Dankner wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (January 6): "The first thing that [Acting Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert will have to do is to impose his authority on the prominent members of this party [Kadima], because authority, whether that of Sharon and whether that of Olmert, is the only glue that will hold it together and give it signs of life. The circumstances are difficult because Sharon, despite his very serious condition, is alive. There are some things that an acting prime minister finds it difficult to do when the man whose place he is filling is among the living.... He will have to battle the centrifugal forces that will try and draw various people in Kadima back to their mother parties, and then will have to charm the public, to instill it with confidence and establish a leadership figure within a short time. Despite concerns that Sharon's leaving the political stage threatens to erase Kadima, obviously there is a public need for a centrist political body that is situated between the naive and politically inexperienced Amir Peretz, and Bibi Netanyahu, who displays insufficient understanding of Israel's urgent need quickly to leave the situation of the occupation

of the West Bank.... If Olmert rises up to the task, he can do it. A great deal is in the balance, both for him personally as well as nationally. All those who think that a balancing and active political center is vital to Israel, must hope that Olmert succeeds."

III. "Praying For Sharon"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 6): "As we pray for the recovery of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, we must already recognize that Israel has lost one of its greatest leaders. Even those who would bitterly deny Sharon's greatness in the sense of leading the nation in the right direction cannot dispute the dimensions of the decisions he led the nation through, which are perhaps unmatched since his mentor David Ben-Gurion's day.... Now, however, we have no choice but to contemplate our nation's future without Sharon.... Accordingly, it is all the more important that each of the major parties coherently and distinctly tell the public what they stand for -- not just what, or who, they stand against. This is especially true for Kadima, which can no longer rest so significantly on the power of one political personality. It will not be enough to pledge to continue Sharon's path since, again, the public could only guess what Sharon's next step would have been."

IV. "The Man and the Legend"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "Sharon evacuated settlements twice. The first time, in Yamit, he was Begin's evacuation contractor. He regretted it later. Then he regretted his regret. The disengagement from Gaza fell entirely on his shoulders. It somewhat improved, as expected, our political and security situation, but increased the Qassam rocket pressure on Sderot and brought the rockets to the outskirts of Ashkelon. Instead of strengthening the Palestinian Authority, it provided a hothouse for anarchy. The enormous importance of disengagement is its effect on Israeli society. Sharon dealt the myth of settling the territories a mortal blow. The public support he earned after disengagement was no less significant than disengagement itself: a huge bloc in the center of the political map came out of the closet. It now openly declares: we are fed up with the territories. That is the big bang. Nobody else, except for Sharon, could have generated this change. Without him, it is not certain that Kadima will be able to maintain its achievements in the polls. There will be voters who will go home, to the Likud, to the Labor Party. But the change he generated will not die."

IV. "Israel's New Era"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in The Jerusalem Post (January 6): "For Israel to be capable of carrying out an attack against Iran's nuclear installations it will need to receive U.S. and NATO backing for the move. The majority of international security analysts agree that Israeli fighter bombers en route to Iran will need to fly over Iraqi airspace and may even need to refuel in Iraq. Turkish bases may also be necessary. Given this, Israel is today in dire need of leadership capable of handling some of the most sensitive and monumental diplomacy in its history -- even if such leadership were only able to convince others to carry out the attacks on our behalf."

VI. "As a Broken Shard"

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined in Yediot Aharonot (January 6): "It is already impossible to avoid reflecting upon the fate of Israel and the peace knocking at its door. What a tragedy: at least twice in this generation, when any chance, any hope, any sign of peace with enemies and bitter neighbors may have come up, a case of 'force majeure' intervened -- be it in the form of an abominable assassin or the hand of God -- and condemned us to continue the bloody conflict. Ariel Sharon, who has served [Israel] for fifty controversial years -- a soldier in the battle for peace who has instilled fear in his enemies and adversaries, may have been the strongest prime minister in recent years. He is lying on his white bed, 'as a broken shard,' and fighting for his life, for another glance, another breath. How awful!"